

[Albert J. Kershaw, Jr., M. D.]

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1429 N.W.3rd Ave.

Miami, Florida

Doctor

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Writer

ALBERT J. KERSHAW, Jr. M.D.

(Negro)

In the congested business district of Miami's "Colored Town" there dwells Dr. Albert J. Kershaw, an outstanding physician who is seeking neither riches nor publicity, but who devotes his time and energy to the welfare and uplift of his race. His main interest is in the nation's fight against tuberculosis. He is in charge of the anti-tuberculosis work in the

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schools for Negroes and does a great deal of charity work connected with his interest in the battle against T. B.

Dr. Kershaw's office is at 1429 N.W. 3rd Avenue. Between two stores occupied by Jewish people, a wooden stairway leads to the second floor of the building. At the head of the stairway, to the left, I observe an open door leading to a room which appears to be a waiting room. A tall black Negro is busy dusting about the waiting room.

"Is this Dr. Kershaw's office?" I ask.

"Yas's have a seat, please," the man replies, politely. "The doctah jus' went out fo' breakfus' a few minutes ago, but he's expectin' 2 yuh." I sit down in the waiting room.

After a few minutes the man carefully locks a door of grilled iron work which leads to the doctor's private office, and leaves the room, walking down a long corridor which leads to the rear of the building.

As I wait I observe my surroundings. Directly across the hall is an open door of what appears to be another apartment. A Negro is standing in front of a mirror shaving.

The furnishings of the room in which I am sitting consist of a small dark oak table (which stand against a wall) with rocker and arm chair to match. The seats of the chairs are covered dark brown leather. An empty hat rack stands in a corner. Four plain wooden chairs are placed against a wall. There is worn blue and white check linoleum on the floor that shows signs of recent scrubbing. On the table are magazines and a thick memo pad with pencil tied to a piece of black string. Altho not elaborately furnished, the room is very clean. Hanging on the wall just above the table, are two framed diplomas belonging to Albert Julius Kershaw, Jr. The diploma on the left reads "Universities Waldensis" and is printed in Latin. The one on the right reads "Faculty and Graduates 1907 [Mcharry?] Medical Dental and Pharmaceutical Colleges of Walden University. Pictures of the class are also on this document.

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A door of solid wood leads to another room. The door is open 3 and I observe the furnishings of this room are about the same as the average doctor's examining room—examination table, cabinet with glass doors contains instruments, many small bottles of medicine, and doctor's equipment; a scale stands in a corner; an electric drop-light is near table. The floor is bare.

Between the waiting room and the doctor's office is a divided partition; the lower half is finished with solid wood; the upper half is made of diagonal iron grill work; a door leading to the office is made entirely of iron grill work. A hanging lock is on this door.

The office has two large windows, which have shades but no curtains. The shades are not drawn. The furnishings consist of a roll-top desk and swivel chair. The desk, which stands against a wall to the right, is littered with papers and letters. On the top of it are some books and also several photographs. Two of these are of fine looking young Negroes in their 20's. In the center is a photograph of an elderly Negro woman in a gold frame. On the other side of the room is a book case lined with books; a small table contains an electric fan. A medicine table is well filled with bottles. Near the desk is a telephone table containing a phone and book. An arm chair somewhat like the one in the waiting room stands near to the desk and faces the window.

Adjoining the office, to the right, an open door leads to a 4 bed-room. A neatly made mahogany bed with clean white spread is visible; mahogany dresser and chair to match, and a window with a freshly starched white curtain can be seen.

Within a short time I hear the sound of foot-steps coming up the stairs and Dr. Kershaw enters the waiting room. Having made an appointment by phone the previous day, he is expecting me.

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"Good morning," he says pleasantly. "Sorry to keep you waiting, come right in my office." He unlocks the door between the two rooms and motions to an arm chair saying, "Have a chair." He sits down in the swivel chair at his desk, facing me as we talk.

Dr Kershaw is a find looking Negro, well mannered and very pleasant; tall and stout, a picture of good health. His hair is partly gray; his features are not negroid in type. His face is stout and the color of a mulatto. He is in his 50's, but looks younger. Immaculately dressed in a white palm beach suit, colored handkerchief in coat pocket, tan silk shirt with small embroidered figures in red and white silk; red tie with diamond stick pin; white shoes and grey and white socks. He is wearing a heavy gold signet ring on the third finger of his left hand.

"My paramount interest lies in the fight against tuberculosis. I have several physicians who work with me and I supervise the tuberculin tests, which are administered by the nurses. Each child in the schools is tested, and where there is an infection, treatment 5 is given, parents are advised, and instructed. All cases are followed closely. I also do a great deal of charity work among my T. B. patients. The lack of food among the colored people is appalling. I also conduct an ambulatory clinic. 99% of my patients are not able to pay the fees but none of them are refused treatment. Altho I am late in getting into the field, I can see a marked decrease in the disease.

Dr. Kershaw's anti-tuberculosis work is well organized. Altho it has never been given much publicity, the work is being steadily carried on by his and his professional helpers, who are using their influence as well as their knowledge to overcome the conditions that have weakened the physical constitutions of the residents of colored town. There is a co-operative work going on among fifteen medical men, both physicians and dentists, and they have a small hospital of their own in addition to the colored ward at the City Hospital. He speaks with much appreciation of the co-operation of the Dade County Medical Association, in its organized work for Negro physicians, and says that every medical man

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in colored town is making the most of the opportunity to take the modern courses offered by the medical association.

“Negro doctors and dentist should be allowed to practice regardless of race, and I see no reason why any white woman should hesitate to call a colored doctor or patronize a colored dentist.

“I believe that eventually there will be no colored race, for 6 the world's history shows that all submerged or minority races have finally been absorbed by their stronger surrounding neighbors, and I believe that the white and colored races in the United States will merge into one ‘American’ race.” Asked about the Indians, he thinks they, too, will be absorbed. “But it won't be for hundreds of years, and none of us will live to see it,” he says.

He is particularly interested in children, and from the day of his arrival in Miami has been a devoted friend of the colored schools. “Athletic work interests me immensely. At the Booker T. Washington school, I organized the athletic work, acted as coach of the ball teams and generally supervised all athletics. At the present time, I am medical advisor and part time financier. I just received a letter from a high official commending my work along these lines,” points to an opened letter lying on his desk. “I consider that athletics makes a student self-reliant, teaches him to give and take, to develop self-control and temperance.” He has a kindly way with the girls and boys and they show plainly that they consider him their friend.

The sanitary conditions of colored town have engaged much of Dr. Kershaw's attention. He is a right hand helper of the faculty of the schools and takes a keen interest in the classes where girls are learning the home arts and domestic science. That the mothers of the future become good home makers is most essential to the welfare of the race.

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“You would like to hear a little about my family history?” he asks as he took a cigar out of his pocket and smoked leisurely. “Well, my ancestors were slaves on the Kershaw

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family for whom the county of Kershaw, South Carolina was named. My father used to speak of our ancestors and how most of their time was spent picking cotton. At the time of emancipation, my parents lived in West Florida. They were born in Jefferson County and also were married there. They had three sons and two daughters all of whom are graduates of the A & M University.

"My father was the first student of the A & M Tallahassee and was a member of the first football and base ball teams. That was is the 80's. He was very proud of the fact that his brothers and sisters, sons and daughters and grandchildren were graduates of his Alma Mater. He always was a good student, did a great deal of writing, especially articles for magazines; he also did some farming. He became a Methodist preacher and travelled in many parts of Carolina, Georgia and Florida. He died in 1917.

"My mother is still living. This is a picture of her," he says as he takes the gold framed picture from the top of his desk and hands it to me. "She is 77 years old and lives in Tallahassee.

"Those pictures are of my sons," he proudly points to two larger photographs. "I have two sons and a daughter . . all graduates of the A & M. My sons were not interested in the medical profession . . they studied the liberal arts.

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"My wife was born in Florida also; we were married in Jefferson County. She teaches at the A & M at Tallahassee now; she is 50 years old.

"Why I chose the medical profession? While a young boy I came under the influence of an elderly physician and I greatly admired this man. He encouraged me in my desire to study medicine. My father also was pleased, because he felt that it would be an avenue of helpfulness to our race. He helped me with my expenses in college to a certain extent, then too, I worked at different jobs during the summer. In those days it was much easier for a medical student to work his way through college than it is today . . and cost much

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less too. Roughly speaking, a college course cost about \$1,500 tuition in those days but it couldn't be done for that amount today.

"I first practiced medicine in West Florida; [Suwanse?] County. I came to Miami 15 years ago, because there was a more fertile field for service among my people; also the financial inducement, there being better prospects in Miami for a man in the medical profession.

"Regarding the schools, my frank opinion is that the schools of the south cannot compare with the schools of the north and the same applies to the colleges. I believe in calling a spade a spade," he continues emphatically as he puts down his cigar and goes into great length on the subject, motioning with his hands.

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"The reason for this condition is the lack of funds here in the south and I believe that Uncle Sam should appropriate funds for education. Parts of the west, also, should have assistance with their schools. It is a well known fact that the endowment funds of Yale, Harvard and Cornell equal or excel the total funds of all the colleges in the south put together. Among the list of names of the 15 colleges given the highest rating in the United States, not one of these is a college of the south; it just can't be done with the funds they have here. I believe the children of the South should be given the same opportunity to obtain a high education as the children of the north.

"Of course," he continues, "I am of the opinion Miami High is a find school, but it cannot compare with the High Schools of the North and I say the same for the grade schools.

"Politics? Yes, they interest me a great deal and I always vote. I keep up with politics thru reading and other sources. Regarding the mess we have at City Hall, I think the mayor and two of his commissioners should be ousted.

"Methodist is my religion, I contribute towards the support of the Methodist church which I attend. I should go more regular tho. I believe everyone should go to some church

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because religion has a good influence on the morals of the people. It helps them to lead the right kind of life.

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"I spend most of my spare time reading. I enjoy ball games of all kinds, also boxing. Occasionally I go to the movies. I never tire of my work, but I am a firm believer that we all need a certain amount of relaxation.

"The question of diet is, of course, a very important matter. The lack of money for the proper food is the root of the trouble among my people. They are instructed as to proper food, but it is difficult for them to live up to those instructions when their funds are so limited. I do not believe people should own a car when they haven't proper food and shelter. In my opinion shelter comes first, food next, and car last.

"Some day, when I am of no further use to my people here, I am looking forward to having a cozy home in the country . . . perhaps a farm too. While I can be of service to my race, I'll remain right here with them. At present, due to my activity in my profession, I find it practical to live right here in the city, altho it would be more to my taste to have a little home in the suburbs to go after my days work is over. However, I have had these rooms renovated to suit me for office and living quarters combined and it does very well for the present. I have some property here in this section, which I rent out. The income from this enables me to do much charity work and helps with my T. B. interest."

I thank Dr. Kershaw for his co-operation and prepare to take 11 leave.

"If, at any time you care to visit the schools and see our anti-tuberculin work in action, I will be glad to have you do so," he says as we walk to the door.

"I may take advantage of the opportunity with the near future, Doctor Kershaw, and thanks so much," I reply appreciatively.